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ABSTRACT

This study examined how, prospective teachers, cooperating teachers, and university supervising instructors saw their roles as learners and teachers and what these individuals learned about learning and teaching English language arts in the context of a partnership arrangement between the University of Alberta's (Canada) Faculty of Education and McKernan Elementary-Junior High school, an urban, multicultural public school. The research method involved participation and observation during campus-based class time and during work with teachers and students at McKernan School and observations and interviews during a subsequent practicum. Data sources included field notes and journal, student and teacher journals, written documents, audiotaped interviews, writing conferences with education students, and observation and interviews with three education students in their practicum schools. Participants were 23 education students, 4 cooperating teachers, a school principal and assistant principal, and a university instructor. Overall, the research suggested that the partnership helped beginning and experienced teachers learn about adolescents, learning, and teaching. Experienced teachers at both levels had the opportunity to look in new ways at practices, theories, and students. By uniting the visions afforded by the university with the visions afforded by the rich immediate context of the school, education students and teachers gained richer, more balanced perspectives than either setting in isolation could offer. (Contains 21 references.) (JB)

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Partners in Language Arts Teacher Education:

Learning about Teaching, Adolescents, and Language Arts

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Partners in Language Arts Teacher Education: Learning about Teaching, Adolescents, and Language Arts

> In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high, hard ground overlooking a swamp. On the high ground, manageable problems lend themselves to solution through the application of research-based theory and technique. In the swampy lowland, messy, confusing problems defy technical solution. The irony of this situation is that the problems of the high ground tend to be relatively unimportant to individuals or society at large, however great their technical interest may be, while in the swamp lie the problems of the greatest human concern.
>
> (Schön, 1987, p.3)

Donald Schön's metaphor serves as a call to action for educators to work together to create a more rich and fertile middle ground from both the "high, hard ground" and the "swampy lowland" of university and school education. In recent years, university and school partnerships are building bridges between their two solitudes of theory and practice, between "knowing about" and "knowing how." One such partnership, now in its seventh year, has brought together education students, university instructors, adolescents, school teachers, and principals to explore and engage in English language arts education.

Context of the McKernan Partnership

"Are there things you could do with your classes if you had four or five extra interested adults in your classroom?" This question, posed by English education professor Margaret Iveson in late 1987, opened the discussion when she first met with school teachers to discuss possibilities for working together at McKernan Elementary-Junior High School, an urban, multicultural K-9 public school. Since this beginning, a middle ground has been created, with ample space to accommodate theory and practice in a dynamic relationship. Over the years, the schedule of work has expanded and contracted, timing has varied, personnel (both from the university and school) have come and gone,

and the focus and structure of activities have varied according to external constraints (such as university and school calendars), interests, and needs of teachers and students in both locales. The partnership thrives, evolving each year in response to the participants' needs and interests.

At the University of Alberta's Faculty of Education, the structure of the secondary education program facilitates integration of theory and practice by including a professional term in the final year of the B.Ed. program (either undergraduate or after-degree). During this term, education students focus exclusively upon curriculum and teaching in their major subject area in an intensive five-week session, followed by an eight-week student teaching practicum and a post-practicum week of synthesis of the professional term experience. In this flexible structure, instructors can integrate school-based experiences with theoretical learning in various ways.

At McKernan School, during the pre-practicum segment of the program, the university instructor and school teachers jointly develop extended experiences for their students. Working within the Alberta *Junior High School English Language Arts Program of Studies* (1987), which accords with James Britton's (1970) model of language use, the partnership teachers and administrators believe that learning is extended, supported, and consolidated by using language in many forms and for many purposes. Though specific topics, themes, and activities vary, the work each year accords with this view of language for learning. Consistent features of the partnership's framework are that education students are not evaluated for teaching performance and do not engage in full-class teaching. Instead, they work in several teachers' classrooms with adolescents individually or in small groups, engaging intensively in reading and writing activities. For their groups of adolescents, the education students plan, teach, and evaluate work; their university assignments relate to their work with adolescents; and the university instructor mediates learning through informal conversations and work sessions. Education students learn in genuine, sustained contexts, filled with the uniqueness, uncertainty, and conflicts of values that, as Goodlad (1984) notes, they will encounter in contemporary schools. Schön's (1987) model of the reflective practitioner is promoted through the structuring of real-life learning situations with teachers and adolescents; education students have ample

time and opportunity to plan and reflect upon this work with experienced teachers at both the university and school levels.

Context of this Research

The study reported here is based first upon my doctoral work (McClay, 1992), conducted principally during the second and third years of the McKernan partnership. My two primary questions in beginning the research were "What are the participants learning about learning and teaching English language arts?" and "How do the participants see their roles as learners and teachers?" Additionally, as I became immersed in the project, questions of the nature and development of successful collaborative relationships and of the ethics of research concerning teachers' practices surfaced with increasing urgency and significance.

My research method involved participation and observation during campus-based class time and during work with teachers and adolescents at McKernan School, as well as observations and interviews during the subsequent practicum and callback sessions on campus. Data sources included my field notes and journal; journals of education students and instructor; written documents, such as course assignments and school bulletins; audiotaped individual and group interviews of all participants periodically during the partnership work, during practicum experiences, and at the end of the term; and writing conferences with education students. Additionally, during the subsequent eight-week student teaching practicum, I observed and interviewed three education students at their practicum schools. Participants were the twenty-three education students, four school teachers who worked with the education students, the school principal and assistant principal, and the university instructor. Normally, education students select either this section of the curriculum-and-teaching courses or another section that organizes school-based work in less intensive ways, but in this third year, university scheduling did not allow such choice.

After completing my doctoral research, I was fortunate to become the university instructor for the partnership for two terms (first as instructor and then as co-instructor). The student and teacher voices I draw upon in the following sections include those from

my research group and subsequent classes. Writing this paper in 1995, I cannot subtract the understandings I have developed over the past years in which I have been instructor and co-instructor in the partnership. These understandings and experiences filter now through my research data, broadening my perspective, raising new questions about research and teaching, and delineating more explicitly the unique qualities of each group of participants. In the following discussion, I will indicate the distinction between researcher-understanding and instructor-understanding when it seems significant.

The scope of this research project is broad, with implications extending to issues such as professional development, the nature and organization of collaborative efforts among schools and universities, and ethical issues of reciprocity and ownership in research. For the purposes of this paper, however, I will narrow my focus to the learning that this partnership work fosters in three respects: becoming and being a teacher, learning about adolescents, and learning about English language arts.

Becoming a (student) teacher: Life "at the edges" and "in the middle"

Education students Marlaine, Michael, and Lorraine jointly wrote and performed a readers theater script in which Marlaine listens to "angel" and "devil" voices whispering in her ear, offering contradictory views of adolescents, of teaching, and of her position among the school teachers. Together they return repeatedly to the bedeviling question:

> *Devil:* Am I a student or
> *Angel:* am I supposed to function as a teacher?
> *Marlaine:* What hat do I wear? I almost seem to be going through a mini-identity crisis....This whole McKernan School project functions as a good transition between taking classes and student teaching. I am given an excellent opportunity to look into classrooms without having the load of responsibility that the teacher has. Instead, I am a university student-helper, a facilitator; but just where on the line between student and teacher does "helper" fit? Who am I when it comes to my relationships with the different people in the school? To the students,
> *Devil:* Am I their friend
> *Angel:* or am I still an authority figure?
> *Marlaine:* To the teachers in the school,
> *Devil:* am I a student because I come from the university,
> *Angel:* or do they see me as an almost-colleague?
> *Marlaine:* I suppose they see me in both lights. The line is not distinct; I am both. I, and my fellow university students, are in a category all to ourselves. We are a middle link between the two domains.
> *Devil and Angel:* We are neither and we are both.

Marlaine: What hat do I wear?
All: The answer is clear--one of each.

For many education students, the development of their understanding of "being a teacher" is the foundation upon which all other learning is based; it is, explicitly or implicitly, their primary concern. Until the foundation of a personal-professional identity is solid, nothing else of importance can be constructed, nothing else of importance even considered. For many, "becoming a student teacher" is the first order of business before "being a teacher" can be approached. In a broader context, Mary Catherine Bateson advises:

> It also seems probable that the most creative thinking occurs at the meeting places of disciplines. At the center of any tradition, it is easy to become blind to alternatives. At the edges, where lines are blurred, it is easier to imagine that the world might be different. (1990, p.73)

At McKernan School, students and teachers move from the center to the edges of the conventional roles of "teacher" and "student." Education students are students and teachers, crossing the traditional boundaries of these roles: they are both and neither. More importantly, they are not "student teachers" in the conventional sense. McKernan teachers and students refer to them as "university partners," "group leaders," or "expert friends." Such blurring of roles provides an ideal meeting place in which to think creatively about the roles of student and teacher, "to imagine that the world might be different."

Having read Nancie Atwell's *In the Middle* in preparation for writing and reading workshop activities with their groups, the education students are in a position to appreciate adolescents' "shuttling" between childhood and adulthood. Like the adolescents of Atwell's classroom, these education students are "in the middle," between student and teacher roles. In their "adolescence" of becoming teachers, many experience a typically adolescent conflict between a wish to mature in the image of the "good" teachers who have inspired them and a dread of becoming the "bad" teachers they also have encountered. They seek ways to mature as teachers without relinquishing themselves as individuals, to place themselves closer to the teacher side of what they often see as the student-to-teacher continuum without sacrificing individuality or the best of their student

natures. For some, a previous four-week practicum has done little to resolve the dilemma because they spent the time play-acting "teacher" in stressful attempts at crowd control that pass occasionally for student teaching experience.

With blurred roles of student, teacher, and student teacher, some education students signal their feelings about their roles in their introductions to their adolescent groups. While most opt for the informality of first names, others more formally use title and surname, and these decisions can reveal self-images and sense of relationship with their young students. Like Dave, some experiment, introducing themselves by first name to one group and by surname to another group in another class. When her relationship with adolescents in one group went sour for Kate, she spoke of being their "student teacher" while continuing to refer to herself as the "university partner" for her other group.

For Lorraine, being "in the middle" allowed her to resolve the troubling question of "distance," which permeated most of her staff-room discussions. She wanted a reasonable and clear answer, a formula perhaps, to the question of how much distance a teacher ought to keep between self and students. This question opened up more when teacher and student stereotypes did not apply: "They always tell you to keep some distance. Everything I've read and had profs tell me is 'keep the distance,' but here everything is the reverse." She worried about whether to tell her students she liked Madonna, for fear of seeming un-teacherly. Then her fellow education student Curt became an instant hero with his adolescent group for revealing that he had once met Madonna in Los Angeles. Luckily for Lorraine, Curt was on hand to advise, "Don't try to be like them, but be part of their world. Sure, you like Madonna and so do they. But you don't like Madonna the way a thirteen-year-old likes her." Curt's words were comforting, but the real confirmation was that Lorraine saw the result of Curt being himself and being "part of their world."

For Dave, life "at the edges" forced him to confront the "wall" he had constructed between himself and his students. In a previous, unsuccessful practicum that he had begun optimistically, Dave had a cooperating teacher who advised, "Don't trust kids, they'll f*** you every time." Preparing for his second attempt at practicum, Dave constructed

"walls" around himself again, a realization that came with his frustration that the adolescents in his group had built similar defenses against him:

> I was really running into a wall. It wasn't the fact that *they* had walls around them–it was *my* wall. I was trying to jump over my wall, take down theirs, and jump back over mine. That doesn't work. . . . I was trying to get them to share something, to express themselves, give me something of themselves, but I'm not sharing anything about me.

With this realization, Dave worked methodically to deconstruct his walls. He focused on the adolescents in his group, learning their interests and bringing in materials and topics to encourage them:

> I'm more aware of what it takes to bring down the students' walls. Like this one kid I'm having trouble with, I found out he's a guitar player. I started thinking, "What can I do to get through to him?" I had something to interest him today. Before, I would have just written him off–he's a failure, a drug user, from a bad home, whatever–but I'm not doing that anymore.

For the participating teachers, the opportunity to spend a little time "at the edges," in Bateson's phrase, provides time and space for professional development. These teachers, like their counterparts in schools throughout North America, have scant time to observe their students at work, to reflect upon their practices, or to engage in professional discussion with colleagues. With several education students in each of their classes and the university instructor available, school teachers have time for observation, for reflection, for conversation stemming from the particular students and situations of their classrooms. They see the weeks with the university students as providing helpful individual attention for their students as well as being a context for their own professional development. As Gerry Bell noted:

> One of the things I like best about the project, maybe it's selfish, is the opportunity for my kids to actually be heard. Having three or four kids there in a group, each one of them has the opportunity to say what they think, to question, and to have that question responded to there in the class.

During these weeks, the teachers can stand to the side to examine their teaching methods and try new approaches. Stuart Capstick likes the thought-provoking questions he fields from education students, particularly when he is "in the middle" of trying new teaching

approaches in his classes: "I found that having [education] students in my room last year made me justify to myself why I was doing things." Gerry Bell used the group leaders in her class to organize the writing of "choose your own adventure" stories, an activity which depended upon the additional help of group leaders for her students. For Don Garry, each year brings opportunities to try new activities in the partnership. As he made a transition to a reading and writing workshop approach in his classes, he welcomed the additional adults as responders and audiences for his students' writing. As education students began to approach him for conferences about their writing, he realized benefits for himself: "It sharpens up my conference skills when I work with the adult writers on their writing."

Learning about adolescents: "They want to be cared for gently, the same as I do."

When university and school teachers organize contexts of blurred roles for everyone (education students, school teachers, university instructor, and school students), they provide opportunities to do more than merely "imagine that the world might be different," in Bateson's phrase, for the education students cannot fall back on conventional "teacher" or "student" roles when insecure. Few of our education students have experienced student-centered learning to any significant extent, and the pressures of beginning teaching certainly reinforce a "performance-centered" focus (Jones, 1988). Because teaching "performance" is not evaluated in this work, nor do they or their instructor engage in "full frontal teaching," in John Goodlad's memorable phrase, education students may add a new instructional strategy to their experiential knowledge base. As they gain experience working in student-centered ways and experience their own learning in a student-centered structure, they can begin to answer for themselves the essential question "Where is the teacher in student-centered teaching?"

The McKernan teachers organize the groups of adolescents with whom the education students work, and their varied structuring of groups ensures that each education student has groups diverse in interests, abilities, and attitudes. When student teachers confront classes of thirty adolescents, they tend to focus upon the ones who demand attention in one way or another, consciously or unconsciously ignoring others. At McKernan, however, with a group of five adolescents, an education student as group

leader cannot ignore or misplace any of them. The adolescent who sits quietly doing no work at all, so easy to pass over in a full class, cannot go unnoticed. The more boisterous adolescent, easier to manage in a smaller group setting, becomes a challenge of another sort, as the group leader labors to build a relationship, to figure out how to establish a working rapport. Group leader Sharon, after agonizing for several days at Laurie's defiant and dismissive behavior, realized in astonishment that Laurie did no work because the work was contemptibly simple for her. When Sharon challenged Laurie with more complex material and respected her abilities, the two worked amiably together and Laurie stopped taunting her groupmates. Meanwhile, Kathy discovered that a polite, cooperative eighth-grade boy, who seemed to write diligently all week, was in fact so desperately in need of assistance that he did not know where to begin to ask for it.

With larger class sizes and increasing integration of special needs students into mainstream classes, teachers face students with an enormous diversity of ability. Reynolds' (1992) review of studies of competent teachers stresses the need to structure groupwork appropriately to meet teachers' own needs and instructional goals as well as the needs of students. Variety in group organization, composition, and task is desirable, but she notes:

> Little is known about how effectively beginning teachers use instructional grouping; however, given descriptions of beginning teachers as less familiar with student differences and ways to accommodate these differences in instruction, beginners may have difficulty selecting the appropriate grouping strategy for a given goal and group of students.
>
> (1992, p.17)

At McKernan, however, education students work in a variety of grouping strategies, and have a genuine context for considering such strategies. Teacher Don Garry usually structures groups of five or six adolescents to be a microcosm of the classroom, though the education students often do not realize this at first; on occasion, some spend a little time thinking that another group has "all the good kids." When they eventually realize that each group has a wide range of students, they can get down to the important question of how to work more harmoniously with their group rather than wishing for some other combination of personalities. Teacher Gerry Bell has occasionally made a show of the

randomness of her groupings, drawing students' names out of two boxes (one for boys' names, one for girls') to organize groups. By organizing groups of adolescents in varying ways, the classroom teachers help education students appreciate the complexities and ramifications of such strategies.

Studies by Paine and others indicate that beginning teachers understand student differences in abstract, idealistic terms rather than in concrete, situational ones (Reynolds, 1992). Their perception of student differences is generally limited to individual (biological and psychological) ones, and, to a lesser extent, categorical ones (class, gender, ethnicity) Armed with abstract notions of fairness and equality in teaching, beginning teachers who are thus limited in understanding differences are unable to make those notions concrete; thus, they tend toward "teaching methods that treat diversity as a problem, not as a phenomenon" (1992, p.10).

Education students at McKernan, however, working with a wide range of students but in limited numbers, often develop more sophisticated understandings of differences, considering pedagogical aspects as well. When Dave, quoted above, began to plan for his individual students, when Sharon realized that Laurie needed more challenge, they tailored work for individuals in ways that beginning teachers cannot generally do in a full classroom, and this student-centered focus carried them forward into a subsequent practicum with full classes of students. The differences, so overwhelming in a full classroom, can be approached individually with smaller groups, a sensibility essential to developing strategies in those larger situations. As Ruth noted of her groups, "They want to be cared for gently, the same as I do."

Education students often have a concept of student-centredness in mind when beginning teaching, but that concept can cause some "bumps" when they attempt to put it into practice. Leyton, writing in his journal, made wry connections to his family life with blind parents:

> Today I taught my first official lesson with the grade 9s. Holy Frustration Batman!!! It's funny how you can read the textbooks, have a personal philosophy about teaching that is student-oriented, come in with a superpositive attitude, and still be like a blind man in an unfamiliar room. I think back to all the times I've moved a piece of furniture at my folks' place and come home to find my mom with a shiner or my dad with a throbbing bruise. They have memorized the layout of

> their house and can manage very competently to maneuver in the obstacle-course-called-a-living-room. Of course, that is until Leyton moves something out of place. Well, something was moved out of place for me today, too.
>
> I had my lesson plan carefully set up, with distinct goals and a little clause called "student-generated ideas." Now for the funny part that is not so funny--I profess, quite loudly at times, how the classroom should be student-oriented, not teacher-oriented, yet somehow I had planned my lesson to accommodate student ideas rather than build on them.

Working from this realization, Leyton began to understand that moving from abstract notions of student-centredness to concrete strategies with real children would require significant attention, energy, and learning.

In providing opportunities for some experiences with children in grades five and six as well as with adolescents, the McKernan partnership also encourages a developmental focus that our secondary-route education students would not otherwise have. For many, work on a readers theater script or a mini-unit on superheroes and mythology with upper-elementary children provides an opportunity to appreciate the abilities of these younger children. They begin to recognize that even their seventh graders have prior experience, prior knowledge, and capabilities. Education student Jeff, a highly sophisticated and accomplished writer, noted enthusiastically after a week's work creating a superhero with his sixth graders, "Those little duffers are amazing! I was really hesitant about working with them, but I volunteered because I had the time. I was blown away by their creativity and their ability to work out the details of the character they created. They did better work than my grade eight group."

Becoming an English Language Arts Teacher: "The teacher needs to *be* what the teacher is teaching."

Writing with his adolescent group, Roy, an education student, rediscovered the pleasures of writing poetry. While laughing at his efforts, "None of it's good, of course," he also noted, "but it really inspired me and showed me . . . that the teacher needs to *be* what the teacher is teaching. Teacher as writer is a wonderful concept."

Barbara, who introduced herself to her university classmates as "a poet," already appreciated writing for herself. In writing with her grade seven students, she struggled

between merely wanting writing time for herself and knowing that she ought to work with her reluctant adolescent writers. Despite the tension she felt during these sessions, she became convinced of the value of sharing her work with her students: "If it hadn't been for that writing, my writing would have been just that–*my* writing–kept to myself." This conviction later helped her to salvage a difficult practicum situation, in which she felt obliged to assume uncomfortable teaching practices; she overcame this feeling of obligation by sharing her writing with her classes. Revealing herself through her writing, she became comfortable with herself as a student teacher.

These incidents of student learning provide an indication of the inter-relatedness of learning that commonly occurs in the McKernan partnership. For many education students, becoming a teacher involves a difficult negotiation between memories of their own schooling and abstract concepts suggested by their curriculum and teaching instructors. The reconceptualization of English language arts learning represented by developmental curricula, process approaches to reading and writing, and emphasis upon expressive language for learning all place heavy responsibility upon the teacher. For a beginning teacher, lacking experience of these approaches and concepts, the approaches suggested by curriculum and teaching texts and instructors can be overwhelming. While academics can speak knowingly of the need for "paradigm shifts" and reconceptualization of learning, education students are often asked to make such shifts with little or no experiential base upon which to construct a new foundation.

The process of becoming a teacher involves negotiating some continuity between one's own educational "story" and possibilities for one's classroom. Sometimes, there is little connection between experience and the possibilities suggested by university instructors or texts; teacher educators often "supply" experiences of approaches–of inquiry learning, writing workshop, or cooperative learning, for example–for our students. These experiences can be powerful, awakening learners to new ways of learning.

While the gap between theory and practice is a common problem in teacher education in general (Britzman, 1991), it is especially relevant in English language arts education. In university curriculum-and-teaching classes, such approaches as writers workshop are commonly incorporated to provide an experiential base. However, their

transformative power for future teaching practice can be quite limited if the experiences only involve university students. Often the meaning they make from the experience is that "This is all well and good for us adults at university," but the question "Will it work with kids?" remains unanswered. The learning doesn't necessarily transfer to their teaching unless they see such approaches during practicum. School and university partnerships provide desirable experiences for education students while also providing real contexts so that education students can learn to adapt approaches to particular individuals and contexts. They can go beyond answering the question of *whether* particular approaches work with adolescents and focus upon learning *how* such approaches can work.

At McKernan School, education students have opportunities to "connect . . . with the structure and ways of thinking characterizing the field (Goodlad, 1984, p.291), both in their own course work and in their work with adolescents. Currently, the structure and ways of thinking in language arts education have been developmental in nature, focusing upon a child's growing sophistication in language use in many forms, in natural situations, and for varied and genuine purposes.

James Britton (1970) called the unrehearsed language with which we think, explore ideas, and express our selves "expressive language," it is the language of learning, and Britton advocated greater focus upon such expressive language in the classroom. While McKernan teachers and administrators focus upon expressive language through a "language for learning" philosophy that promotes active learning, the education students also engage in language for learning in preparing and engaging in language arts activities with adolescents. The work involves meaningful contexts and mediated support for learning; their journal writing and informal talk with peers and teachers are two of the ways in which such expressive language is emphasized within the professional community to foster greater understanding of language, of writing, of reading.

Process approaches to English language arts education place a heavy responsibility on the teacher, who becomes, in effect, the primary resource (Courtland, 1990). This responsibility also suggests the need for multiple models of teachers, rather than the traditional apprenticeship model of traditional practicum programs. At McKernan School, education students learn that diversity of teaching styles is possible within a common

philosophical framework. They see teachers who use a variety of approaches that can loosely be termed "reading and writing workshops," as well as teachers who organize in other ways. They learn that there are many ways to be student-centered, many ways to organize, to work with reading and writing processes, to respond to student needs and interests. Teachers who share resources and ideas both initiate them into a professional community with explicit values and set an example for their later teaching.

Writing with Adolescents: "The workshop has an atmosphere uniquely its own."

At McKernan School, the education students work in double-layered workshops: they write and revise pieces for a portfolio of their own writing, and they write with their groups of adolescent writers. In both workshops, the "writing floats on a sea of talk" (Britton, 1970), as education students work with each other, with adolescents, with McKernan teachers, and with their university instructor on ideas, first drafts, revisions, and essential questions of intention and audience in writing. In both workshops, their writing informs their learning and teaching about writing.

A portfolio assignment requires writing in varied forms and evidence of development over drafts of several pieces of writing. While English majors are often quite comfortable writing a personal essay, research paper, or précis, they are often less comfortable writing in other literary forms. The requirement for varied forms "nudges," as Atwell (1987) writes, writers to work in less-familiar genres. Of the twenty-three students in my primary dissertation group, eleven wrote their first poems ever, and several more, with slightly trembling hands, produced their first poems or short stories since their own adolescence. For them, as for Roy, the lesson of teacher as writer may be "a wonderful concept," but it is also a grueling one, and they learn that when teachers write with students, they make themselves vulnerable but that vulnerability is a prerequisite for student trust. Anya described her first writing conference, when she asked teacher Don Garry to confer about her poem:

> I had written a poem, and I said, "I'd like to have a conference with you [Don], just to see what these conferencing sessions are all about." And he cut right to the

> core, like I was just sweating and shaking and turning red, because I'd never read anything I'd written to anybody besides my bosom buddies . . . .

Leigh, working with her adolescent group, confronted the contradiction of asking students to write with honesty when a teacher does not also write. In her poem, which she shared with her adolescent writers, the speaker is a teacher who encourages students to write "real words, [that] come from deep down inside./Face up to your fears!" but admonishes, "Just don't ask it of me." The poem and her honesty in sharing it with her students became a turning point in her work with her writing group and with her writing of poetry.

Ironically, some of the adolescent writers are more experienced writers than some of the university students. For these university students, comfortable notions of "being the teacher" with university knowledge are dispelled when they must acknowledge, as did Eileen, "These kids write better than I do! How can I help them write?" For Eileen and for others, the superior writers in their groups provided a clear incentive to continue learning and continue writing.

Writing her first poems, writing with adolescents and with her university classmates, Joanne learned powerful lessons about writing, about teaching, about ownership. Her poem is a statement of part of her learning:

The Poem

I helped out a student
With her poem today.
I said, That's not quite right--
You should try it this way.

It'd sound so much better
If you used this word, too.
Don't you like how that looks?
'Course, it's all up to you."

She looked at me with trust
And then she wrote a while.
"Is that better, teacher?"
"Yes, and I like your style.

You express yourself well
For a writer so young.
I'm eager to see you
Begin your next one!"

So she handed it in
To me with great pride:
Her worship for "teacher"
Was bright in her eye.

I looked at it later
And to my great surprise--
It was her view of life
As seen through my eyes!

Teachers who "coach" and encourage their students' writing still face the dilemma of evaluation; at what point does a coach transform into an evaluator? How can a teacher be an evaluator without undoing the progress he or she has fostered as coach? Michelle, submitting a portfolio for evaluation, included a poem in which she agonized over the difficulties of evaluation, revealing the tension between her coach and evaluator roles.

Evaluating 9B
there is terror in my thoughts of you

that there is something I will be
unable to hide from your
intense eyes, that I will blunder
make a mistake, that you will notice
the other me

that there is another me in the shadows

a certain terror that as you trust me
after you have given yourself
your mind, voice, soul, everything
that is you has been offered

and we have searched in the dark so long
you will turn on the light and find
I have changed. and again I will be speechless, unable to explain

that the writing on your page and
across your heart
is not me: it is
the teacher, the other person
hiding in me.

defective.
judgmental.
crouching behind her knees
covering her face and eyes
from the glare of the dangerous rays.

For Michelle and for the other education students, their first efforts to evaluate student writing occur with knowledge of the writer's intentions and process, because the education students have provided support and guidance during the writing. Evaluation remains a wrenching responsibility for English language arts teachers, but these beginning teachers work with their professor and the school teachers, evaluating their first students' papers with guidance and discussion of the many considerations that are involved in evaluation.

Education students Pam and Susan, each unaware of the other's writing, wrote slightly fictionalized incidents from their own experiences as student writers. In both incidents, teachers responded inappropriately and insensitively to teenage writers who had written from their hearts: one writer was ridiculed and the other was encouraged to delete controversial aspects of her work to make it more palatable to judges of a writing contest. The incidents remained as traumatic lessons of the power of teachers and the dangers of careless or insensitive response. In their adult writing, both women attempt to construct useful lessons for their own teaching from these painful memories.

In working with their adolescent writers, education students learn of the difficulty of responding to the content, and not just the mechanics, of writing. When children are genuinely empowered to write about their concerns and interests, this freedom of topic opens a Pandora's box of delicate issues, with social and political implications, with real consequences for writers and teachers. Questions such as whether one student's writing indicates a serious consideration of suicide or whether another student's writing ought or ought not to be censored because it seems racist or sexist are raised in meaningful contexts, where the answers are not clear-cut and the consequences are deeply significant and unavoidable. These questions are the real stuff of teachers' dilemmas when working with children and encouraging them to develop their voices in writing. They are questions that cannot be answered categorically in textbooks or by curriculum-and-teaching instructors, they must be explored delicately in context. For beginning teachers in particular, the expertise of those who have broader experience of these questions is essential. The university instructor, working with the adolescent writers at hand, cannot

forget the real work of school teachers, and these "stories" inform further research and learning (Iveson, 1993).

Reading Poems and Stories with Adolescents: "You can't stuff literature down people's throats."

Joanne wanted to do an enjoyable lesson on humor with her grade 8 group. She planned to have fun reading several short excerpts from longer works, excerpts chosen as light, even silly, reading. After the class ended, she was crushed, reporting that her group thought the excerpts dull, very dull. She learned quickly from her five eighth graders that Jane Austen was not their idea of light humor; for Joanne's next lesson, she asked her group to find pieces they thought humorous in the school literary anthology. Using these pieces as discussion starters, she accomplished her original goal of discussing what makes writing funny. Along the way, she also was reminded that humor is in the eye of the beholder, and that adolescent and English teacher beholders' eyes may see things differently.

While teacher educators know that many beginning English language arts teachers lack experience writing in varied forms and responding to student writing, we confidently expect them to have much experience with reading literature in varied forms. And they do, but sometimes they need to remember themselves as adolescents and to learn about adolescents unlike themselves.

Reading with their groups at McKernan School, education students learn about reading–their own and others', about adolescents' tastes in literature, and about reading literature in classes. They begin to build reading lists, also considering readers with different tastes and backgrounds than their own. And like Dave, many are led by adolescents to question their implicit assumptions about reading literature.

During McKernan's school-wide silent reading time, Dave sat in the staff room or a classroom absorbed in his science fiction novel. Chance conversations with an adolescent and with me, fellow sci fi fans, led to his reconsideration of the view of literature fostered by his own schooling. Tacitly, he had divided literature up into "classics" (to be studied in school) and "entertainment" (to be read only for enjoyment and

certainly not in school): classics versus popular literature. In his university English courses, the heavy reading load sapped his energy for lighter reading. In conversation with me about our mutual appreciation of science fiction, he noted offhandedly, "Too bad we can't do this stuff in school." I tried to help him examine that assumption, but the question only opened up for him when an adolescent asked him incredulously, "You mean *you* still read sci fi?"

These conversations led Dave to question his assumptions about selection of reading materials as well as activities with literature in classrooms. As he focused upon questions of reading literature with students, he used his adolescent group members as resources. He was startled to learn that a boy who read Stephen King was also reading *A Tale of Two Cities* independently; the boy recommended group discussions to help sustain reading of difficult classics, and Dave appreciated the good sense of that recommendation (which, incidentally and apparently forgettably, had also been suggested by his textbook author, instructor, and me).

In recent years, the McKernan work has often featured a poetry reading workshop with seventh grade students, and, increasingly, this work seems as important for the education students as for the seventh graders. The McKernan teachers, in varying structures, ask the education students to read and write "lots" of poetry with their adolescents; consistently, their agenda has been enjoyment of and experimentation with much poetry rather than knowledge of particular structures or poetic devices. The work often culminates in a celebration of poetry reading, with classes reading their own and published poets' works. In their university groups, education students read widely, from resources supplied by their instructor and McKernan teachers, as well as those brought in from libraries and home bookshelves. As education students prepare lessons for their groups, their focus is likewise on adolescents' enjoyment of the poetry rather than on "examples" of various poetic devices. Visual and musical links are exploited to help adolescents understand that poetry is visual, rhythmic, and lively. In groups of five, adolescents won't tolerate the mindnumbing worksheet exercises on figurative language that substitute for the study of poetry in many classrooms, and education students learn to look for poetry to interest individuals rather than to serve as exemplars.

This poetry workshop is increasingly recognized as a significant activity because many of our English education students, despite their formal studies of poetry, have little familiarity or comfort with the genre. Others have avoided the formal study of poetry altogether in their English courses. In informal discussions and swapping sessions, many of them learn of poetry's power and enchantment for the first time. They speak commonly of getting over their "fear" of poetry, their "poetryphobia," and their uncertainty about how to talk about a poem. More striking still, in the subsequent practicum, many of these education students are assigned to teach a poetry unit. Whether this is perhaps due to a similar discomfort on the part of experienced teachers is a matter for speculation.

Transitions to Practicum and Beyond: "We are partners in teaching."

The work of teachers and students in the McKernan partnership offers possibilities for learning–about being teachers, about adolescents, and about English language arts learning –that serve as a transition to practicum by exploiting the resources of both settings as well as by off-setting or contextualizing some of the typical shortcomings of the traditional practicum experience. The resources of the university, in the presence of an instructor with specific subject-area expertise, make available for students and teachers a broad theoretical foundation, experience in English language arts education, and mediation of the learning situation. The resources of the school provide education students with the reality of a school context, expertise and mediation of experienced teachers immersed in the particular school context, and interaction with children in a structured, gradual introduction to the roles and responsibilities of teaching. This gradual introduction features real-life contexts that reduce performance pressure for beginning teachers, that allow beginners to focus upon several adolescents rather than upon full classes, and that incorporate work and ample time with several teachers. Most essentially, the partnership offers a model of harmonious theory and practice within a professional community of language arts educators.

For the University of Alberta students, the practicum that follows their work at McKernan School is traditional in most respects. They are evaluated for their teaching performance by one or two cooperating teachers; they teach full classes; and they are

expected to assume most or all of the cooperating teacher's teaching load at some point in the practicum. They have two half-day callbacks at the university during this eight-week practicum, and weekly visits from a university supervisor; following the practicum, they have fifteen hours of classtime in which to synthesize their learning and focus upon directions for their future learning.

The student teaching practicum, though often regarded by education students as the highlight of the traditional teacher education program, has shortcomings that are well-documented, significant for future professional attitudes and growth, and that inspire calls for the reconceptualization of teacher education programs (Goodlad, 1990, 1984; Lanier, 1995; Zeichner, 1992). Isolation, pressure for conformity (real or perceived pressure, for it amounts to the same thing), evaluation pressure, and the implicit or explicit organizational message of apprenticeship often lead to "overlearning" (Schön, 1987) and serve to "wash out" the voice of the university. Moreover, even when supervision is attempted, the voice of the university is often ineffective during a context-saturated practicum due to the occasional or uneven quality of this supervision (Zeichner, 1992). Practices adopted as survival tactics in student teaching become for many teachers the practices that survive, as teachers have little time, energy, or support in the first hectic years of teaching to reflect upon the broader implications of their teaching methods (Zumwalt, 1986).

The McKernan partnership, however, offers a counterpoint to the pressures of student teaching. It influences their perspectives and–for many–their actions in practicum. By providing multiple models of teaching, within which shared philosophical stances of student-centredness and "language for learning" are manifest, the individual teachers and the organizational structure mitigate against overlearning and conformity. Those student teachers who feel pressured into conformity during practicum can contextualize their performances, as do some education students who speak of keeping journals of their "unlived student teaching lives" or leading "double lives" by writing of their preferred teaching strategies. When a student teacher was told by her cooperating teacher that grade 10 students "can't write short stories," she knew with certainty that her grade 8 and 9 students at McKernan School did, in fact, write fine short stories. Ted, having enjoyed

writing with his adolescent groups at McKernan School, went into a practicum placement in which his cooperating teacher assured him that writing poetry was an activity for elementary children only and that junior high children had, in Ted's paraphrase, "advanced beyond the need to write poetry." Ted altered his unit plans in accordance with his cooperating teacher's beliefs, noting later, "However faulty that reasoning is–were the poems we were studying written by elementary students?–I had to realize that I was in his class and had to work within his constraints." Ironically, Ted had only just discovered his own "need to write poetry."

When the practicum placement offers some degree of harmony with the practices in evidence at McKernan School, student teachers are well-prepared to fit in with their new context. When Dave, Denise, and Pascal, two at junior high schools and one at a senior high, found themselves with cooperating teachers who relied partly upon workshop approaches to writing, they were able to teach in these situations with a sophistication that impressed their cooperating teachers. More importantly, they were able to contextualize their teachers' approaches, understanding that there are as many ways to structure writing workshops as there are teachers.

In providing for nonevaluated teaching, the teachers and education students at McKernan School can communicate without the "artificial" (as two teachers term it) assessment of student teachers' performances. A "norm of collegiality" (Little, 1987), rather than an apprenticeship model, is promoted. The education students' pervasive performance anxiety is diminished, if not completely banished. When teacher Don Garry was willing to serve as a writing conference partner for university students, many took their drafts to him before conferring with their instructor, aware that he was not their portfolio evaluator. Without the pressure of full classes and performance evaluations, education students can learn lessons in teaching with fewer and less dramatic consequences than in conventional practicum situations, which often degenerate into management crises. Joanne, for example, learned to consider her students' ages and perspectives in selecting "humorous" literature, a lesson more easily learned with five students than with thirty. Annette, teaching a mini-unit on fables, learned to prepare her

questioning strategies better, another lesson more easily learned with five students. They also felt the benefit of a professional community.

Teacher educators know the frustration of having a cooperating teacher tell the student teacher, "Forget everything you learned at the university. This is the *real* world." For student teachers whose curriculum and teaching courses are located in "the real world" of a public school, this advice seems peculiar at best. These education students have a perspective of their professional culture that precludes the "us and them" antipathy toward the university that they sometimes encounter during student teaching. They have been initiated into a professional community. Rather than being socialized into the customary isolation of the classroom, education students are welcomed into a diverse community whose members demonstrate affectionate respect for staff and students and whose resources–both material and experiential–are offered for their use immediately and in the future. This professional community includes teachers, education students, and the university instructors; it offers tangible support for lifelong learning, as experienced teachers discuss their efforts to incorporate new methods into their teaching repertoires and to work in uncharted ways with students. They openly regard education students and instructors as resources for their own learning. Roy considered the network of classmates and teachers with whom he worked at McKernan school as resources for future help and learning in his own teaching, noting, "We are all partners in teaching."

In some senses, the McKernan partnership clearly is a training ground for change agents, as the education students have demonstrated, not only later in their own classrooms, but more immediately in practicum as they negotiate clearance to introduce new teaching methods into these practicum classrooms. Education students repeatedly note that without the work at McKernan, they would not persist in requesting permission to introduce methods outside their cooperating teachers' practices; they also routinely report their cooperating teacher's satisfaction with the teaching and organizing that results from these negotiations. Such risk-taking, though certainly not unanimous, is notable, for it is an uncommon feature of practicum situations. Carolyn Heilbrun notes that power is "the ability to take one's place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one's part matter. This is true in the Pentagon, in marriage, in friendships, and in

politics" (1988, p.18). And in the staff room, she might have added. Many of these education students, despite their apprentice status, feel empowered to speak in their staff rooms during student teaching and expect that their ideas matter. The work with school students and teachers, not the textbook readings or university classwork, supports their confidence and willingness to take risks. Arlene negotiated with her senior high school cooperating teacher to incorporate a "viewing workshop," modeled on the writers workshop she had participated in at McKernan School. Drawing upon her experiences there, she introduced an unfamiliar approach and took a great risk by "translating" it into a new medium. Her cooperating teacher, willing to let her take the risk, was impressed with her success and her initiative. Alice, Nicole, and others who took risks and introduced new teaching methods into their cooperating teachers' classrooms, were delighted to see their cooperating teachers' enthusiasm and apparent intentions to continue the methods afterward.

Vistas: From the High Ground to the Swamp and Back Again

While Donald Schön's discussion of the "high, hard ground" and the "swampy lowland" are apt for teacher education, I also see it as an apt metaphor for research: the "high, hard ground" of pure theoretical research and the "swampy lowland" of research contextualized in school settings. Certainly, I feel that I have journeyed to the swampy lowland, not only as companion and chronicler for the partnership participants, but also in my own right first as researcher and later as teacher. Emerging, a little asthmatic perhaps, I am happy to have made the journey.

As a metaphor for professional practice, Schön's description seems more apt than ever. "Swamps" do contain the problems of greatest human interest, but they also contain more "context" than most of us can attend to at any given moment. For the inexperienced traveler, the context is all-consuming, but, in attending to the context, this traveler misses the view and misses much of the surrounding life of the swamp, perhaps even the essence of its life.

In many nature preserves, interested visitors observe and enter into the life of the swampy lowlands. They walk on wooden boardwalks constructed above the mud and water, close enough to reach out and touch the life they observe. They are protected, but only partially; in fact, they cannot help but get wet, as the boardwalk is invariably under water in some places. So, they get their feet wet, they are brushed by leaves along the walkway, they are bitten by mosquitoes. They also, however, experience in some degree the real life of the swamp and how the plants and animals form a whole, complex system teeming with life and competing interests.

Our education students need to walk into the swamp during their professional education. For their first encounters, however, they need the support of the "middle ground" of a boardwalk. They need to be in the swamp but not engulfed by it, not gasping for breath. A boardwalk supports them, helps them see beyond the immediate and look out over the scene to survey the larger picture of the swamp and the land beyond. In the swamp, they need the expertise of naturalists who know this particular patch of land and the land beyond, naturalists who don't overwhelm them with taxonomy but who help them learn in this setting and prepare for another journey. Teacher educators benefit as well from our journeys with our students, journeys that wet our feet, make us wheeze, and continually test our assumptions.

We speak often in education of "scaffolding" learning for students. School and university partnerships can be boardwalks which provide scaffolding for learning both for beginning and experienced teachers. With the support and mediation of university and school teachers, education students learn about children, about learning, and about teaching. Experienced teachers at both levels have the opportunity to look in new ways at our practices, our theories, and our students. By uniting the visions afforded by the university with the visions afforded by the rich and immediate context of the school, education students and teachers gain richer, more balanced perspectives than either setting in isolation can offer.

Note: In my discussion of their school and their work, I have used the real names of McKernan School and the teachers and administrators who work there, in accordance with their wishes. I use pseudonyms for the education and school students quoted and discussed in my dissertation to

protect the anonymity of those who may be vulnerable for any comments that might be construed as negative. During the dissertation work, Myer Horowitz helped me resolve the difficult ethical issue of "protecting" sources who do not wish to be anonymous by suggesting the idea of "layers of anonymity." I have used the real names of those education students whose writing or words I have quoted from my relationship with them as their instructor, in accordance with their wishes.

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